

Helping your child to love reading

There are lots of fun ways to help your child to love books and stories. And, surprisingly, not all of them involve sitting down with an actual book.

Use books to bond

It's not all about reading the words. At this age it's more about enjoying the interaction with Mum or Dad. When your child sits in your lap as you read aloud, not only are they enjoying books, they are also enjoying the security of your undivided attention.



Set up a ritual

A regular reading time establishes a calming routine that young children love -- that's why the bedtime story is a time-honoured tradition. But don't forget that many other daily events also provide good reading opportunities. Once in a while try establishing a new ritual with a breakfast story, a bathtime story, a just-home-from-nursery story or even an "on the potty" story. Some toddlers (and older children) who are heavy sleepers are much better able to face the day when their parents "read them awake" rather than hustle them out of bed.

Choose appropriate books

Toddlers love board books, bath books and pop-up books -- any type they can hold easily and manipulate themselves. They love stories accompanied by bright, clear realistic pictures. And, of course, they love rhymes. That's not to say your two-year-old won't appreciate the stories that big brother or sister chooses -- who knows, *Harry Potter* may end up being their favourite book! Just make sure he/she has access to simpler books as well.

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Stifle your yawns if you've read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* every night for the past month and your child still asks to hear it again. **Repetition** is a hallmark of the toddler years. The reason children love to read the same stories over and over and over again is that they're thirsty to learn. You'll soon find that your toddler has memorised their favourite passages and is eager to supply key phrases themselves - both are signs of increasing readiness to read.

Ham it up

Lose your inhibitions when you read to your child - Growl like the Daddy Bear in *Goldilocks*, squeak like Piglet in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Kids love drama as much as adults do -- in fact, your youngster may love to pretend to be the scary wolf in *The Three Little Pigs*. Encourage them, even if it slows the story's progress. They will get more out of the story if they are participating actively.

Follow her interests

Choose books about their favourite activities -- visiting the zoo, swimming, playing catch. Back up favourite videos and TV programmes with books about the characters. You may be mystified by the appeal of Teletubbies, but if your child loves the cheery little creatures, they will love the books about their exploits as well. Follow your child's lead, but do experiment with a wide variety of books. A small who loves dolls and dressing up may, to your surprise, also be the one who asks to hear stories about dinosaurs and monsters again and again.

Go to the library

Even babies like library story-time, and they're wonderful adventures for toddlers. Your child may well discover a new favourite story when it's presented with some pictures or puppets to illustrate the action. And, of course, libraries allow parents -- and toddlers -- to take home countless stories without spending a penny.

Use the spoken word

Many wonderful books exist on CD or via downloads. You can feed your child's eagerness to hear *Puss in Boots* for the umpteenth time, (even when you need to do an important job), by putting on a story, instead (with or without the accompanying picture book). You could also record books and stories yourself, or ask a beloved friend or relative to do so. Hearing Granny's voice reading a favourite story is a special treat.

Don't make books a reward

Don't tell your child they can listen to a story if she/he finishes their dinner. When reading is associated with systems of reward and punishment, it isn't a positive experience. Instead, pick times to read that feel natural, such as when you want your toddler to quiet down before a nap.

Dealing with a wriggler

Some wriggly youngsters just won't sit still through all of *Spot's Birthday Party*. Don't worry about it. Just leaf through something short for a few minutes (or even seconds) and then let them go. The next day you can try a slightly longer session. Some children will always be more interested in running around than in reading. If your toddler is the physically active type, she/he may respond best to the non book-related activities described below.

Make storytelling a part of life

While you're at the dinner table or in the car, tell stories -- standards like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* are fine, or anecdotes from your own childhood or stories that feature your child as a central character. Make books of your child's drawings or favourite photos, and tell stories about them -- or ask them to be the narrator.

Point out words everywhere

Wherever you go, you can show your child that words are an important part of everyday life. Even the youngest toddlers quickly learn, for example, that traffic signs say STOP. Alphabet magnets are widely available to put on your fridge at child height. Other families label objects around the house, such as the shelves that house *Lego*, *Blocks*, and other toys. If your child is in playgroup or nursery, slip a daily note into their lunchbox - even if they can't yet read, receiving a note with a drawing of a heart or smiley face with a simple "I love you", will be a high point in their day and help excite their interest in reading and get your toddler excited about the meaning behind words.

Talk

According to research, children from families who talk at the dinner table have larger vocabularies. Talk with your toddler, and don't be afraid to use complex words and phrases. Encourage her questions and explanations. Toddlers are curious and wonder endlessly about the world, so don't be shy about trying to explore her interests with her.

Demonstrate your own love of books

Your child wants to imitate you. If she sees books all around the house and knows that you like to settle down with one whenever you have a moment to yourself, she'll learn that books are essential to daily life. Showing her your own love of reading is more powerful than making your child sit through a rigid story time.